

Memo to File

Subject: Wisconsin Wolf Season (February 2021)

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Under Wisconsin law (29.185), if the gray wolf is not listed on the federal or state endangered lists, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR) must allow the hunting and trapping of wolves. After the gray wolf was federally delisted on January 4, 2021, the state of Wisconsin held a wolf harvest season in February 2021.

The most recent monitoring effort, prior to the February 2021 harvest, indicated a minimum of 1,034 wolves in Wisconsin, primarily across the northern third of the state and the Central Forest region (Wiedenhoeft et al. 2020). The Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan (WI DNR 2006) ("Plan"), provides that public harvest may be used to control the wolf population "if other control activities do not adequately maintain the population near the 350 goal." Plan at p. 21. , The Service evaluated the Plan in the final delisting rule, including the provisions regarding post-delisting regulated public harvest, and found that the Plan was sufficient to address the threat of human-caused mortality. 85 FR 69,828-69,832.

The total harvest quota for the February 2021 season was set at 200 wolves. Of the approved quota, 119 wolves were allocated to the state, and 81 wolves were allocated to the Ojibwe Tribes in response to the Tribes' declaration and in accordance with their treaty rights within the Ceded Territory. Harvest quotas were established for 6 geographic zones. See Figure 1, below.

The WI DNR's approved quota considered 2020 wolf population data, population response to previous harvest seasons, scientific literature, and population model projections. According to the WI DNR, the quota's objective was to allow for a sustainable harvest that neither increases nor decreases the state's wolf population (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/wolf/index.html>).

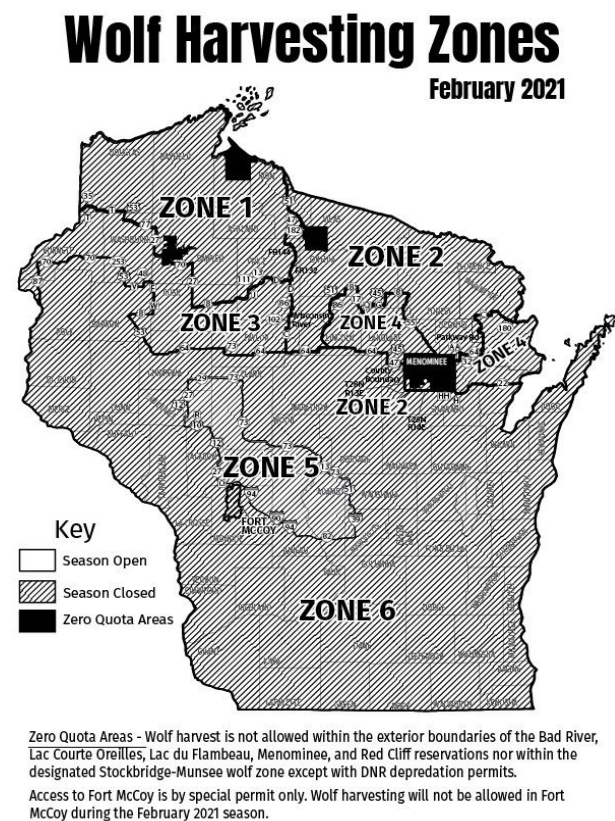
The DNR may close a wolf harvesting zone to both wolf hunting and trapping based on harvest information. Early closure of a wolf zone takes effect 24 hours after the DNR announces the closure. The February 2021 wolf harvest season closed at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, February 24, after all zones reached their quotas. A total of 216 wolves were registered as harvested (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/wolf/index.html>).

The February 2021 quota is similar to the quotas set by the WI DNR for hunts that occurred in prior years when wolves were federally delisted. 85 FR 69,832 (2012-2013: quota was 201 wolves and 117 wolves were harvested; 2013-2014: quota was 275 wolves and 257 wolves were harvested; 2014-2015: quota was 156 and 154 wolves were harvested).

The Service is initiating post-delisting monitoring as required under section 4(g)(1) of the Act and as detailed in the Post-Delisting Monitoring Plan (USFWS 2008). We will monitor the

health of wolf populations in Wisconsin (and Minnesota and Michigan) for at least the next 5 years. During this period, we will review the monitoring data provided by the states, tribes, and federal agencies, and other relevant information. Through this process, we will assess the impacts that the February 2021 harvest, any subsequent harvest seasons, and other factors, in combination, may have had on the wolf population in Wisconsin. If there is evidence of a substantial downward change in the populations or an increase in threats to the degree that population viability may be threatened, we will investigate the underlying cause, the likely duration of the decline, and other data relevant to wolf population viability to decide if a proposal to relist, an emergency relisting, or other action is warranted. Annual post-delisting monitoring reports will be made available in the fall of each year, with the first report expected in 2022.

**Figure 1: Wolf Harvesting Zones and Quotas (WI DNR,**  
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/wolf/index.html>)



Zone	Quota	Harvest	Status
Zone 1	31	50	Closed
Zone 2	18	45	Closed
Zone 3	20	43	Closed
Zone 4	6	7	Closed
Zone 5	27	31	Closed
Zone 6	17	40	Closed
Total	119	216	

### **Literature Cited**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2008. Post-delisting monitoring plan for the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment of the Gray Wolf. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities Field Office and Midwest Region. Bloomington, MN and Ft. Snelling, MN. 13 pp.

Wiedenhoeft, J.E., S. Walter, M. Gross, N. Kluge, S. McNamara, G. Stauffer, J. Price-Tack, and R. Johnson. 2020. Wisconsin Gray Wolf Monitoring Report 15 April 2019 through 14 April 2020. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, WI. 18 pp.